

# ARCHITECTURE, MODERNITY AND TRADITION, OR THE MISREPRESENTATION OF MODERNITY

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n the last few years, the media throughout Europe have once again taken up the debate as to whether it is better to preserve old buildings or, on the contrary, to replace them with new ones, of modern design, and leave as few buildings standing as possible. The debate, then, centres around the question of whether it is necessary, to adapt to a more modern life and culture, to sacrifice the largest number of buildings possible.

In my opinion, this dilemma over modernity and conservation is a false one and, furthermore, is largely responsible for the fact that our architectural surroundings are being degraded, prey to uncontrolled speculation. First of all, no modern approach has ever consisted in demolishing anything. There are buildings that have nothing modern about them at all and there are rehabilitations and renovations of old buildings that are examples of aesthetic, ethical and technological modernization. The modern avant-gardes of Europe and of Catalonia were never opposed to already existing buildings so much as to the retrograde academies that controlled architecture and hindered progress in art and culture.

Secondly, the approach that consists in defending the incompatibility between modernity and conservation only defends what is modern in architecture on the basis of certain "styles" that are identified as being modern. This confusion between modern culture and specific styles is



simply the result of an academic attitude which the modern movement had always wanted to avoid.

Thirdly, modernity always taught us to be wary of modern styles and to judge architectural quality more from the point of view of the renovation of proposals and the quality of attitudes, transformations and concepts of experimental aesthetics that are adequately

adapted to the needs of each particular situation.

A nostalgic defense of the styles of the past (even if they are modern), or mimetic utopias of a galactic future, based on the comparison of any European city to New York or Miami, can never constitute modern approaches. All we can achieve by mimicking these town-planning projects is a ridiculous cultural situation worthy of the third world.

For these reasons, rather than to confront modernity and tradition, or modernity and conservation, one should analyse the best and the most modern transformation alternatives for our present architectonic and urban environment without previously deciding on styles or deciding what has to be demolished. In this way, modernity will develop within the city's culture, not automatically, but with a full sensitivity towards that which is unique to each place and each society.

Neither the immobility of historicisms, nor that of the futurist imitations, will help us to modernize our surroundings. Only the dialogue between modernity and tradition has any chance of success today.

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